In the ensuing trial of strength the chief opponent of Hsiang Yii was he who was later termed Liu Pang. Under the Ch'in, Liu Pang had been a minor official in his native district. He is said to have been of an open and generous disposition, fond of his cups, and with an eye for a pretty face. He could also, as it proved, be persistent, prudent, shrewd, and cruel. Charged with conducting a group of forced laborers to the mountain where the tomb of Shih Huang Ti was being built, he set his prisoners at liberty and, putting himself at the head of a few of the boldest of them, became an outlaw in the mountains and marshes of Central China. In the disorder which succeeded the death of Shih Huang Ti, he was chosen to head his native district and attached himself to Hsiang Liang in the effort to revive the state of Ch'u. He quickly became a leading commander of the forces of that principality and was soon Hsiang Yii's major rival.

In the fighting between these two doughty generals the victory seemed to perch upon the banner first of one and then of the other. At one time Hsiang Yii offered to settle the issue in single combat with Liu Pang, but the latter, more cautious, declined. At the outset Hsiang Yu seemed to be in the lead, for he routed Liu Pang's army and captured the father and wife of his antagonist. Later the rivals made a treaty, dividing the Empire between them. This compact Liu Pang almost immediately broke (B.C. 202) and, in a great battle which followed, brought about the downfall of his enemy. Hsiang Yii fled from the field of his disaster with a few devoted followers, still desperately fighting, and, when all was obviously lost, committed suicide.

Liu Pang's subordinates—possibly not without

prompting—
offered the title of Emperor to their commander, now clearly the master of the country. After the ostensible reluctance and triple refusal which etiquette prescribed, Liu Pang accepted (%.c. 202), thus perpetuating the form of unity which Shih Huang Ti had begun. The date from which the new dynasty was reckoned was not B.C. 202, but B.C. 206, when Liu Pang had become *Wang* of Han.

The Han made permanent the work which the Ch'in had begun, and endured, with two marked interruptions, for over four hundred years—centuries which were among the most glorious of China's long history.